



SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Percy Darrow, a young scientist in search of a job enters the office of "Boss" McCarthy of New York. McCarthy has just been threatened by an anonymous message ordering him to flee to Europe. He does not take the message seriously.

CHAPTER II—Darrow goes up the elevator to see Mr. Knox. Suddenly the electric apparatus in the Atlas building goes out of business. Experts are unable to locate the trouble.

CHAPTER III—All at once, without apparent reason, electric connections are restored. The next evening McCarthy is warned that unless he leaves at once for Europe a sign will be sent him at six. Promptly at that hour the entire electric apparatus of New York is cut off and the city is thrown into a panic.

CHAPTER IV—Percy Darrow thinks he has a clue.

CHAPTER V—He engages the help of Jack Warford, a college athlete.

CHAPTER VI—They visit McCarthy and offer to run down the cause of his mysterious trouble. McCarthy has just received another warning by wireless.

CHAPTER VII—At six a deadly stillness falls on the Atlas building, blinding out all sound. Darrow is arrested as he leaves the building.

CHAPTER VIII—He is undisturbed because he believes he is on the right track and that another portent will appear at six.

CHAPTER IX—This time the whole town is thrown into darkness and all hearing suspended. Under cover of the confusion Darrow escapes from jail.

CHAPTER X—The city is prostrated with fear.

A man observing the flight of an aeroplane for the first time loses his sense of strangeness inside of a few minutes; and yet flying has been since the days of Icarus considered one of the impossible achievements. So the general public of Manhattan were becoming accustomed to reversals of form in the affairs of the physical world. The frivolous majority, having discovered nothing to be apprehended from the phenomena save a few hours helplessness of a sort, and much to be gained through the savor of novelty, were inclined to an amused or irritated attitude, depending on the ex-

tent to which its occupations were interfered with. The minority took to religious meetings and interpretations. Darrow's exit, and that of his companions, were greeted uproariously. "Please go away and let me sleep!" sang one, at the blinking men. "Here's another!" shrieked a gamine. "Get up! The porter wants to make up your berth!"

Several of the crowd, pending the usual arrival of the police to clear the corridor, had ventured through the wide portals, and were experimenting with this strange palpable quality of darkness. One or two popped inside the curtain, but emerged quickly, looking a little scared.

A bright youth made the discovery that if one lighted a match and stepped within the blackness, the match was immediately extinguished, but that upon emerging into daylight the flame came up again. Some one happened along with a plumber's gasoline torch. Immediately this was lighted and the experiment repeated. The bearer of the torch, astonished at the instant extinguishment of the flame, felt with his hand to see what could be the matter. Instantly he uttered a yelp of pain, and leaped outside, displaying a badly burned palm.

"There wasn't no flame; I swear it!" he explained excitedly, "but she burned, just the same!" He rushed about from one to another displaying his injured palm to whoever would look.

Darrow paid little attention to this gathering crowd. First of all, he scanned a paper he held in his hand; then plunged back again into the blackness.

Jack Warford and Hallowell, left together, hesitated uncertainly.

"He'll be back," the reporter decided finally, "and he's the man to tie to."

While waiting, he proceeded to pick up what information he could from the bystanders. It seemed that the first intimation of anything wrong was followed very shortly by the emergence of McCarthy, disheveled, hatless, star-

ing, gasping. The boss had stumbled into the street, hesitated, then started south on a run. Before any one could stop him, he turned a corner and disappeared. The excitement at the Atlas Building had distracted attention from him. Nobody wondered at his getting rattled and running away. The few tenants remaining in the building had stumbled forth, vowing never to return to such a-assorted adjectives—building. That was all there seemed to be to say.

In the meantime the crowd had increased from a few hundred to thousands. Police appeared. The corridors were cleared of all but a few. Among these were Hallowell and Jack Warford; the former as a reporter, the latter as the reporter's companion. Doctor Knox and Professor Eldridge arrived shortly. After a time Darrow reappeared, sauntering quite calmly from the pall of darkness, as though emerging from behind a velvet curtain.

CHAPTER XII.

The Unknown.

It now becomes necessary to glance in passing at the personal characteristics of Professor Eldridge. This man was in about his fortieth year, tall, spare, keenly intellectual in countenance, cool, possessed of an absolute reliance on the powers of science, beyond which his mental processes did not stray. His manner was distinguished by a stiff unbending formality; his expression by a glacial coldness of steel-gray eyes and a straight-line compression of thin lips; his dress by a precise and unvarying formalism, and his speech by a curious polysyllabic stiffness.

This latter idiosyncrasy would in another have seemed either priggish or facetiously intended. With Professor Eldridge it was merely a natural method of speech.

Withal, his scientific attainments were not only undoubted, but so considerable as to have won for him against many odds the reputation of a great scientist. His speciality, if such it might be called, was scientific diagnosis. The exactness of scientific laws was so admirably duplicated by the exactitudes of his mind that he seemed able, by a bloodless and mechanical sympathy, to penetrate to the most obscure causes of the strangest events. It might be added that practically his only social ties were those with the Warfords, and that the only woman with whom he ever entered into conversation was Helen.

At sight of him Percy Darrow's lounging gait became accentuated to exaggeration.

"Hello, Prof!" he drawled. "On the job, I see. Good morning, Doctor," he greeted Knox. "What do you make of it?"

"I make of it that the Atlas Building will shortly be without tenants," replied the doctor; "me, for one."



Started South on a Run.

Eldridge surveyed Darrow coldly through the glittering lenses of his glasses.

"The cause of these extraordinary phenomena is self-evident," he stated. "You mean their nature, not their cause," replied Darrow. "In nature they refer back to the interference with etheric and molecular vibrations. That," he added, "is a fact that every boy in the grammar-school physics class has figured out for himself. The cause is a different matter."

"I stand corrected," said Eldridge. "Such lapses in accuracy of statement are not usual with me, but may be considered as concomitant with unusual circumstances."

"Right-o!" agreed Darrow cheerfully. "Well, what about the cause?"

"That I will determine when I am satisfied that all the elements of the problem are in my hands."

"Right-o!" repeated Darrow. "Well, I'll bet you a new hat I'll land the cause before you do. Be a sport!"

"I never indulge in wagers," replied Eldridge.

"Well," said Darrow to Jack and Hallowell, "come on!"

Without waiting to see if he was followed, the young man again plunged into the black and clinging darkness.

"Get hold of my coat," his voice came to the others. "We're going to climb."

Accordingly they climbed, in silence, up many flights of stairs, through the cloying darkness. At last Darrow halted, turned sharp to the left, fumbled for a door, and entered a room.

"Simmons?" he said.

"Here!" came a voice.

"I thought you'd be on the job," said Darrow, with satisfaction. "How's your instrument? Going, eh? We are in the wireless office," he told the others. "Sit down, if you can find chairs. We'll wait until the sun is shining brightly, love, before we really try to get down to business. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime—" repeated both Jack and Hallowell, in a breath. "Go on, my son," conceded the latter. "I bet we have the same idea."

"Well, I was going to say that I'm not in the grammar-school physics class, and I want to know what you meant by your remark to Eldridge," said Jack.

"That's my trouble," said Hallowell.

"It's simple enough," began Darrow.

"We have had, first, a failure of all electricity; second, a failure of all sound; third, a failure of all light. The logical mind would therefore examine these things to see what they have in common. The answer simply jumps at you: Vibration. Electricity and light are vibrations in ether; sound is vibration in air or some solid. Therefore, whatever could absolutely stop vibration would necessarily stop electricity, light and sound."

"But," objected Jack, "if vibration were absolutely stopped, why wouldn't they all three be blotted out at once?"

"Because," explained Darrow, "the vibrations making these three phenomena are different in character. Sound is made by horizontal waves, for example, while electricity and light are made by transverse waves. Furthermore, the waves producing electricity and light differ in length. Now, it is conceivable that a condition which would interfere with horizontal waves would not interfere with transverse waves; or that a condition which would absolutely deaden waves two hundred and seventy ten-millionths of an inch long would have absolutely no effect on those one hundred and fifty-five ten millionths of an inch long. Am I clear?"

"Sure!" came the voices of his audience.

"That much Eldridge and any other man trained in elementary science already knows. It is no secret."

"It hasn't been published," observed Hallowell grimly.

"Well, go to it! The task of the independent investigator, of which we are some, is now to discover, first, what are those conditions, and, second, what causes them. With the exception of Mr. Hallowell, we all know what this guiding power is."

"Don't get it," growled Simmons.

"Now, look here, Simmons, you are very loyal to McCarthy, for whatever reason, but your loyalty is misplaced. For one thing, your man has disappeared, and will not return. That last message scared him out. For another thing, we're going to need you in our campaign, the worst way."

"I'm from Copenhagen; you got to show me," said Simmons.

Darrow laughed softly.

"We'll show you all right," said he. He sketched briefly for Hallowell's benefit the reasoning already followed out, and which it is therefore unnecessary to repeat here. "So now," he concluded, "we will consider this hypothesis: that these phenomena are caused by one man in control of a force capable of deadening vibrations in ether

and solids within certain definite limits."

"Why do you limit it?" cried Hallowell.

"Because we have had but one manifestation at a time. If this Unknown were out really to frighten—which seems to be his intention—it would be much more effective to visit us with absolute darkness and absolute silence combined. That would be really terrifying. He has not done so. Therefore, I conclude that his power is limited in applicability."

"Isn't that a little doubtful?" spoke up Jack.

"Of course," said Darrow cheerfully. "That's where we're going to win out on this sporting proposition with our dear Brother Eldridge. He won't accept any hypothesis unless it is absolutely copper-riveted. We will."

"I think you underestimate Eldridge," spoke up Hallowell. "He's the only original think-tank in a village of horse troughs."

"I don't underestimate him one bit," countered Darrow; "but we have a head start on him with our reasoning; that's all. He's absolutely sure to come to the conclusions I have just detailed, only he'll get there a little more slowly. That's why I want you in on this thing, Hallowell."

"How's that?"

"We'll publish everything up to Gato and cut the ground from under him."

"What's your special grouse on Eldridge, anyway?" asked Jack.

"—"

TO BE CONTINUED

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